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SUBJECT: VIEWS OF ABRUZZO EARTHQUAKE ZONE; POTENTIAL IMPACT
ON G8

REF: A. ROME 428
[B.](#) ROME 402
[C.](#) ROME 392
[D.](#) ROME 302
[E.](#) STATE 33560

[11.](#) (SBU) Summary: In order to gauge progress in earthquake relief and reconstruction, particularly as to how conditions on the ground may impact planned G8 events near the epicenter, Embassy recently met with the Italian official in charge of earthquake relief and reconstruction, as well as with U.S. earthquake specialists representing a well-known California NGO who had just completed a site survey. Civil Protection Director Guido Bertolaso and his team told Charge April 29 that about one-third of all structures in the impact area have been inspected for safety. About 65,000 persons are currently displaced. Charge, Management MinCouns and other U.S. staff also had the opportunity to view the entire town of l'Aquila, the provincial capital of Abruzzo and now the main venue for the G8 Summit. The expansive Guardia di Finanza complex, which has been identified as the site for G8 events, appears to have ample space and undamaged facilities. U.S. representatives from Earthquake Engineers Research Institution (EERI) separately briefed Emboffs. They praised Italian authorities for their careful and methodical inspection of housing and infrastructure. Significantly, they reported that the main hospital only a few blocks from the G8 site sustained damage and remains closed. The town of l'Aquila proper still lacks electricity or gas, though the Italian base of operations at the Guardia di Finanza headquarters -- where the G8 will likely be held -- has uninterrupted power. Aftershocks are continuing, though diminishing in magnitude. End Summary.

Praise for Civil Protection

[12.](#) (SBU) On 24 April, Chair of the University of California-Berkeley Architecture Department Mary Comiero, structural and geotechnical engineer Marko Schotanus, and Architectural Conservator Mersedeh Jorjani of the Earthquake Engineers Research Institution briefed Embassy Rome State Department and Secret Service officials. During the week of 20-25 April, a team of nine EERI experts in geosciences, architecture, and structural engineering had surveyed the area in and around l'Aquila, at the invitation of the Italian government. L'Aquila was the epicenter of an earthquake on 5 April, and it is where the GOI intends to host the G8 summit in early July. The experts were very positive about the work of Italian government officials involved with disaster

assistance and reconstruction.

¶3. (SBU) The EERI group praised the work of the Italian Department of Civil Protection, saying that in their collective view, based on experience with numerous earthquakes in Italy, California, and elsewhere, the GOI was well-organized, knowledgeable, and proceeding cautiously in certifying buildings and infrastructure as safe. The EERI team said that access to affected areas has been tightly controlled to prevent looting and to maintain physical safety. Unlike past practice, Mr. Schonatus said that the GOI was inspecting each structure individually before judging it safe. According to updated official numbers provided to Charge on her April 29 visit to the epicenter, 17,000 of 45,000 structures in the quake zone have been inspected. Of these, 50 percent have been determined to be habitable. However, these numbers do not rpt not include the historic medieval center of l'Aquila which sustained a proportionately larger share of damage. There are currently approximately 65,000 residents displaced -- 30,000 in hotels and another 35,000 in tents. In the opinion of our sources, 15,000 to 20,000 persons are likely to be displaced for a period greater than two months. The Charge's team was told that plans are underway to construct temporary housing for these individuals until they are able to rebuild for themselves.

Problems with the G8

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¶4. (SBU) Civil Protection Director Bertolaso told Charge

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that the very large Guardia di Finanza site (45 hectares in all) would offer ample space for both Summit and reconstruction activities. In the opinion of the EERI experts, the decision to move the G8 to l'Aquila will likely complicate earthquake reconstruction efforts and could, however, pose serious logistical challenges. The arrival of thousands of officials and press in July could further complicate reconstruction efforts. Traffic jams are already common and the EERI team noted that there is only a single road in and out of the proposed summit site. Although the citizens of one region welcomed the GOI's decision to move the Summit, seeing it as offering visibility to the damaged town, the team warned that the mood of displaced people could become significantly more negative over the coming months. Comiero explained that following a major earthquake, displaced people typically feel shock, but that shock gives way to anger once they realize they may be living in tents for over a year. She believed that the people of l'Aquila are still in the shock phase now, but that they might be angrier by July, particularly if the pace of reconstruction were to slow.

Infrastructure and Aftershocks

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¶5. (SBU) The EERI experts said that the infrastructure in and around l'Aquila was in generally good condition. An elevated highway between Rome and L'Aquila had been only lightly damaged, as it had been built with anti-seismic technology. EERI estimated that twenty-five percent of the buildings in and around l'Aquila sustained significant damage and are not repairable. The electricity and gas grids remain shut down for the city, but the Guardia di Finanza building in which the GOI is organizing its reconstruction efforts enjoys uninterrupted access to power. While the main hospital only a few blocks from the site of the G8 sustained significant damage to its emergency room and remains closed, a military-style field hospital has been set up in an adjacent parking lot. According to the EERI team aftershocks have continued in the region since the earthquake, but they have generally been diminishing in magnitude.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: (SBU) The information post secured from

the visiting U.S. earthquake team should be put in appropriate context. First, we do not yet know the size of the "G8 footprint" that will descend on the earthquake epicenter at l'Aquila. Indications are that a reduced set of proceedings will occur at that location, although we will be in a better position to judge this when we visit the site with the pre-advance team later in the week. Second, the Italian government is well aware of the conditions detailed by our team and will be energetic in putting infrastructure deficiencies to rights. Finally, we have good contacts within both the government and NGO community working at site. End Comment.

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